

U.S. Department of State

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The International League for Human Rights, the Lawyers' Committee for International Human Rights, the Inter-American Association for Democracy and Freedom, the Human Rights Office of the National Council of Churches, and the Washington Office on Latin America

Our organizations were established to promote human rights, to document and publicize violations of human rights, and to work for victims of human rights violations around the world. Events in Chile since the beginning of the year compel us to voice our shared concern about the apparent escalation of repression and violations of basic human rights in that country. We make this finding of a further deterioration of human rights in Chile despite some reports indicating that the human rights situation there is improving.

We find the following five aspects of human rights abuse in Chile to be of particular concern:

1) Persecution of the Church

A pattern of systematic intimidation of the Church has emerged over the past several months in Chile. Church buildings have been ransacked. A number of Church members have been harassed, some subjected to arrest, detention and torture. And, in July, the leader of the Catholic Church of Chile, Cardinal Raul Silva Henriquez, received a death threat from a paramilitary organization.

2) Internal Exile

This year, Chile has implemented a new decree law providing for internal exile, which further restricts civil guarantees already severely limited by virtue of the "state of emergency" imposed by the military junta since 1973. While previously internal exile in Chile could only be imposed by court order, Decree Law 3168 of February 6, 1980 has conferred all authority concerning internal exile to the Minister of the Interior who may impose internal exile for up to 90 days without charges, court review or the right of appeal. Since the decree took effect, over 80 individuals have been compelled into internal exile, all to remote areas far from their homes and families, some living under severe hardship.

3) Prolonged Detention without Charge

Also this year, the Internal Security Law was amended to increase the permitted period of detention of persons by security agents from five days to 20 days without charge.

Evidence has been presented before Chilean courts indicating that prisoners were frequently subjected to torture and inhuman treatment during the five day detention period. The extension of the period between arrest and the bringing of charges provides an opportunity for even greater human rights abuse by security police.

4) Torture

The deterioration of the human rights situation in Chile is further evidenced by the continued illegal detaining and systematic torturing of large numbers of Chileans. Reports indicate that 1,000's of persons have been illegally arrested during the first six months of this year and that many of these persons have been subjected to torture during interrogation.

While those individuals who have publicly differed from the government have routinely been singled out for especially harsh treatment, in recent months individuals who were not critics of the government, or in any way involved in politics, have also been targets of government persecution and harassment.

5) Plebiscite

On September 11th, the Government of Chile has scheduled a plebiscite for the ratification of a new constitution which would have the effects of prolonging the present non-democratic regime until 1997 and of conferring absolute authority on the president. In light of the absence of free debate, the banning of political parties and the general climate of intimidation in Chile today, we regard the proposed plebiscite as a further violation of human rights.

Conclusion

Although the Chilean Government disclaims responsibility for many of these human rights violations, we feel that the illegal activities of the paramilitary organizations and members of the secret police could not continue without the support and complicity of the State. Therefore, our organizations appeal to the Government of Chile to respect the rule of law and uphold international human rights standards.